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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 TASHKENT 000312

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/CEN, EEB/ES, OES

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SENV](#) [EAID](#) [UZ](#)

SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN: REMOTE VILLAGE BIO-GAS DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: The remote mountain village of Khumsan has a bio-gas demonstration project, using primitive technology that converts livestock manure into bio-gas and provides four participating families with electricity, heat, and gas. It is designed to last ten years without repairs or spare parts. The village is not connected to the power grid, and converters such as this one are the only feasible sources of energy for the villagers other than the nearby rapidly depleting forest. NGO Ecoforum of Uzbekistan also wants to develop ecotourism to scenic mountains and remote villages, but villagers are skeptical and want to know how they will benefit. Tourists need a place to stay that also has heat and electricity, and Ecoforum thinks ecotourism cannot be developed without alternative energy in villages and mountain regions. While the project is very impressive, it is still too expensive at present. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) The mountainous remote village of Khumsan, a few hours outside of Tashkent, is typical of many such villages. It has no electricity or heating in the village, and villagers have to cut trees down for heat in the winter, creating a serious problem of forest depletion. One resourceful and very assertive villager, however, named Tojibay (first name only), succeeded in getting a bio-gas demonstration project constructed at his house with the help of an NGO consortium that included the Uzbek environmental NGO Eco-Forum. The total cost of the project was \$17,000, with the Uzbekistan NGO Association paying one half, and the local government and four village families paying the other half.

¶3. (U) The bio-gas generator, using primitive but highly reliable and durable technology, provides the four participating families with electricity, heat, and gas. The bio-gas generator converts livestock manure into bio-gas and stores it in a large steel container. Villagers can then siphon off the gas they need from an attached compressor. The designer, bio gas expert Rakhmedov Bazerbai, proudly pointed out all the features of the bio-gas converter, noting that the converter is designed to last ten years without repairs or spare parts, with the possible exception of a broken or corroded turn valve. Bazerbai boasted that this

generator can take raw manure and convert it into a high grade powdered fertilizer that the village can sell on the market for a very good price. One is struck by the extreme simplicity of the design but at the same time just how suitable such a low-tech converter is for remote villages like Khumsan.

14. (U) At present, only four families are paying to use the gas, since it is just a limited demonstration project. Bazerbai said it would cost at least ten times as much to run a power line to the village. He said the villagers have long ago given up on the idea that one day they will be connected to the main grid, so converters such as the one at Tojibay's house are the only feasible sources of energy other than the rapidly depleting nearby forest. As if to underscore the impact of renewable energy in this village, Tojibay has two large solar panels on his house, also the result of an earlier demonstration project.

15. (U) Ecoforum of Uzbekistan Chairman Sanginov Saidrasul, who helped arrange the visit to Khumsan, noted that Ecoforum is also keenly interested in developing eco-tourism. This would include eco-tourism to the scenic mountains as well as to remote villages such as Khumsan. However, he noted that villagers are somewhat skeptical about this "tourism" because they want to know how they will benefit. They are not interested in having strangers come into the village, litter their homes, and then leave. Saidrasul

TASHKENT 00000312 002 OF 002

believes that eco-tourism can generate additional revenues for villagers, but villages must have a place for tourists to stay that also has heat and electricity. For that, the lodgings will most likely need to use some form of renewable energy, such as the bio-gas converter currently in operation. For Saidrasul, ecotourism cannot be developed without alternative energy in villages and mountain regions. He also noted that villagers must see a difference between regular tourism ("Kazan-tourism" where people come, eat and drink, and leave behind conspicuous trash and waste) and "eco-tourism" before they will be willing to support eco-tourism.

16. (U) COMMENT: The bio-gas project is very impressive. The technology is amazingly simple, such that you wonder how it can work. But it does. The one significant drawback, however, is that such projects are too expensive at present. This particular bio-gas converter cost \$6000 for four families for ten years, or \$1500 per family.....averaging out to \$150 per year. For poor villagers, that is a lot of upfront money. Micro-loans would also have to be available, and the villagers would have to see that it is to their advantage to take on such a debt, given that most villagers are already heavily indebted. END COMMENT.
NORLAND